

PAGEANT BUILDING

By Florence Magill Wallace



Published by the
Illinois Centennial Commission

[Printed by the authority of the State of Illinois]

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By Florence Magill Wallace

Author of "Money-Making Entertainments", "Entertainment Helps for Teachers", and the pageants, "Simple Truth", "Yesterday To-day and To-morrow", "Humanity", Etc., Etc.



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*"Ye who would learn the glory of your past
And form a forecast of the things to be,
Give heed to this, a city's trumpet blast, and see
Her pictured life in pageantry."*

—F. H. WILLIAMS.

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INTRODUCTORY NOTE.

WITH authority resulting from successful experience, Florence Magill Wallace, the author of this Hand Book, tells in simple, concise words the salient facts about pageants and pageant building.

The bibliography on American Pageantry is extensive, but this addition commends itself because of its briefness and directness, and because it gives, like the rules of First Aid, the knowledge necessary for immediate action.

That this work will assist in the inception and production of pageants, and through them bring community betterment, increased civic consciousness, and patriotic education, is the hope which prompts its publication.

JESSIE PALMER WEBER,
*Chairman, Pageant Committee,
Illinois Centennial Commission.*

CHAPTER I.

The Purposes of Pageantry.

“LET’S give a pageant” is an often-heard, worthy suggestion. But too frequently the project goes no further than the suggestion. Though hundreds of American cities have the pageant habit, there are many more too timid or too conservative to undertake such ventures. An examination of the facts shows that such timidity is not well founded.

Giving a pageant is a big task. No one can deny that. But the bigness of it is just what makes it commendable and worth while. A pageant, to be ideal, should be thoroughly democratic and of sufficient size to involve the interest, cooperation, and assistance of all the citizens of the community. Pageants should be built in sizes corresponding to the numbers in the community making the presentation.

The necessary qualifications for giving one are civic pride and the desire for community betterment. No city is too large and few are too small to measure up to these qualifications.

Of the many reasons why pageants should be given, three stand out in importance: First, to provide patriotic education; second, to promote community solidarity; third, to give a large number opportunity for self expression.

By no other means can the history of a particular city, state or nation be so well and deeply impressed. “The Birth of a Nation,” the motion picture that successfully depicts post-Civil War conditions, is an historical pageant. Not only do pageants serve in educating the foreign born to an appreciation of the growth and progress of the place of their adoption, but they are equally effective in arousing loyalty and devotion in those who call the particular place “home.” History visualized is always more impressive than history merely read about. The pageant affords excellent opportunities for carrying home lessons in practical patriotism.

Pageants promote community solidarity by appealing to the community consciousness and by requiring large numbers to work together cooperatively. That the aftermath of a great pageant leaves the factions, the wards, the north sides and the south sides less divided against each other, is the invariable testimony of those who have given it a trial. It has in it a great “get together” influence. Many who would otherwise remain strangers, get acquainted, and in a larger sense the whole community becomes acquainted with itself. A pageant well done is occasion for satisfaction and pride to each one taking part as well as to all who attend or in the smallest way assist. Not infre-

quently these great spectacles awaken such an earnest desire for a better and more beautiful city that they serve as forerunners of extensive cleaning and beautifying enterprises.

To afford opportunity for self expression is one of the great missions of American Pageantry. Our industrial system more and more limits self expression. We are living in an age of ever increasing specialization. Fifty years ago the man who learned to be a piano-maker had to know how to make the case, how to set and tune the strings, how to adjust the action of the mechanism—in short, how to build and complete a piano. Now, by contrast, the man goes into the factory and instead of learning how to do many things, he learns how to do one thing rapidly. If he works on the strings he does not work on the sounding-board or the case. Specialization takes much of the art out of work and thus automatically creates the demand for more art in play. So it often happens that a pageant day marks an epoch in the lives of many of the performers, for from that day they realize the importance of ease and grace in action, and dignity and poise in appearance. Greatest of all is the benefit which comes from the consciousness of having been a part of a beautiful spectacle. Because of its size, its elasticity, its adaptability, the pageant is the best known vehicle for giving an outlet to the innate and holy desire for self expression.

These three reasons for pageantry by no means exhaust the list, but they are sufficient to indicate something of the merit in the suggestion, "Let's give a pageant," and to commend the suggestion as worthy and acceptable.

CHAPTER II.

Laying the Foundation.

ASSUME now that the suggestion, "Let's give a pageant," has been favorably received, and has evolved into the resolution, "We are going to give a pageant." Without such a resolution no pageant is possible. If the decision is merely, "We are thinking about giving a pageant," or "We have appointed a committee to investigate the possibility of giving a pageant," or "We think that later, perhaps next year, we will give a pageant," the chances are that the pageant project will vanish into thin air. But if the resolution is definitely stated, plans for action will be duly forthcoming, and the labors of the pageant promoters will not prove in vain.

The first thing to do is to prepare. Prepare against the social slackers who will lament the resolution because it involves so much work; against the procrastinators, who think that no time is so good as later; against the calamity mongers, who say, "It is an extravagance that we can not afford"; against the gossips, who say, "Mrs. So-and-So is working hard for it just to further her own ends." Be prepared to pay no attention to such detractors. Their influence is negligible unless encouraged by too much attention. You have resolved to give a pageant. Now stay loyally by your resolution—that is the first thing to do. You will find if you take this attitude that that which loomed as a large difficulty will fade into insignificance. Remember that giving a pageant is a patriotic service and proceed like patriots in the discharge of your duties.

The second step is to secure sponsors for the pageant and to appoint the necessary committees. Sponsors are necessary for the reason that it takes capital to put an affair on right. When properly done a pageant will pay all expenses and clear up a handsome sum besides, but having it sponsored puts it on a right business basis in the very beginning and arouses the keen interest of responsible, well-to-do citizens. Take care to get the right kind of person or committee to secure sponsors. Pageant efficiency begins right at this point.

The necessary committees that should be selected without delay are, first, the Supervising Committee, or Committee on Arrangements; second, Grounds Committee; third, the Publicity Committee; fourth, Finance Committee; fifth, the Cast Committee; sixth, the Music Committee; seventh, the Costume Committee. For advice about committees see special chapter IV on "Committees."

Now that you have made your resolution, secured your sponsors, appointed your committees, you have laid the foundation for a successful pageant.

CHAPTER III.

Superstructure.

TO complete the superstructure and make it a work of art it is necessary to call for the direction of a Master Builder. This Master Builder, better known as the Pageant Master, may be secured from among your own citizens or may be called in from another place. Whatever your decision as to your Pageant Master, it is well to bear in mind that only an individual of exceptional gift and broad, thorough experience is capable of making a successful presentation. Money spent in securing the very best Master is often economy, and it not infrequently happens that an outsider can deal more efficiently with the large number to be handled than can some local leader handicapped by too many intimate personal acquaintances.

See to the matter of securing the Master at the earliest possible date and get from him necessary preliminary directions. When he arrives be ready to recognize him as commander in chief, and without whining or whimpering implicitly obey orders. Remember that to take in charge a large number of children, young men and young women, and often even older men and older women, and in a few days have them prepared to walk, talk, ride, run, dance and sing in a manner to convey a spectacle of natural beauty, is such a huge task that it can be well accomplished only when each participant does his very best.

Let the building proceed rapidly to completion. Hit the iron while it is hot. While the Advertising Committee is heralding the event far and wide, and the sponsors and patrons and patronesses are selling the tickets, let every other committee be equally active in discharging its particular duties.

Thus may successfully be built a pageant which will provide excellent entertainment, promote community solidarity, and give opportunities for self expression. Let those who put their hands to such a constructive task cease not their efforts until a completed temple of beauty stands imperishable in memory.

CHAPTER IV.

Committees.

FIRST—Committee on Arrangements or Supervising Committee. Experience has demonstrated that it is well to have at least three, and not more than five, on this committee. The duties correspond to the duties of the directors of an incorporated company in business. They direct the business, but do not look after the details. They outline definite policies and plans, and act as a court of final appeal in all disputes. The success of the pageant depending largely upon this committee, requires that each member should be capable and enthusiastic.

Second—The Grounds Committee. Three members are enough. Use on this committee those who have the taste to select an ideal place and the business ability to make such preparations as clearing away fences or debris, building bleachers, boxes, and dressing rooms. Employ no lazy persons on this committee; select those who do not shrink from hard work.

Third—The Publicity Committee. Perhaps five members are better than only three for this committee; but in no case should the number exceed seven. Suggestions for the work of this committee will be found in the chapter on "Finances and Advertising."

Fourth—The Finance Committee. Use one member only for this committee and let all funds pass through his hands, and all expenditures receive his O. K. This method avoids confusion and enables the committee to keep a clean, clear record of all money taken in, as well as of what is paid out. Obviously the individual should be one of unquestioned honesty and business ability.

Fifth—The Caste Committee. Three members are sufficient. If additional help is needed the three may appoint helpers. The duties of this committee are to *secure* and *keep* a caste. Securing a caste is often easier than keeping the completed caste up to quota, and in good working order. Certain members of the caste will withdraw or resign. Often this happens because of sickness. (Frequently the illness is real, and not merely pretended.) Some will withdraw because they have not been assigned star parts. The Caste Committee must meet all such exigencies with quiet calmness, and if unable to reason the deserters into returning to the ranks, it must, without fuss or complaint, procure suitable substitutes. Do not burden your Pageant Master with these difficulties. To do so limits his efficiency and makes it impossible for him to stage the best possible production. Many Caste Committees take the wrong attitude in their efforts to get indi-

viduals to take part. They approach the prospective performer as though they were asking a favor. In reality the favor is on the other side. It is a privilege and an honor to be a part of such a great event, while the training under the direction of a competent Pageant Master more than recompenses for any loss of time or inconvenience. It is not necessary to beg any one to do his part if the matter is presented to him as an advantageous privilege that he can not afford to let slip, rather than as a duty you are begging him to perform. Tact, patience, skill and determination are required of the Caste Committee.

For a pageant of magnitude, when a large caste is necessary, most of the work of the Caste Committee must be accomplished through helpers. An ideal plan is to have the Caste Committee select for each group of performers a chaperon, whose duty it is to secure and organize the members of this group. For example: There will perhaps be needed a large group of young girls to take the parts of the Indian maidens. For this group it is advisable to invite the local camps of the Camp Fire Girls. Ask one of the leaders of a camp to be the chaperon; she to invite the required number, tell them of the first meeting for rehearsal, accompany them to this first rehearsal. It is not necessary for a chaperon to attend all rehearsals, oversee details regarding costumes, etc. And so with all the chaperons for the various groups.

The duty of chaperonage should be assigned to those who have, aside from natural fitness for the work, the social prominence and prestige to impress the public with the fact that the pageant movement is sponsored by the best and most popular women of the city. When the services of fifteen or twenty such women are enlisted, and their names as chaperons are sufficiently advertised, the success of the personnel of the caste is assured. Ask these women to be careful in choosing from each and every faction comprising all of the social activities of the town. Endeavor to enlist the members of every society which stands for service. Do not ask too many from one family, unless all are especially talented. Talent should be considered first. Let the chaperons meet together and compare lists of names; see that no prominent singer or artist is omitted. Invite them all, whether they are on your calling list or not. Invite the caste within three days and have the required number ready by the time the Pageant Master arrives for the first rehearsal.

The requirements needed for this committee as a whole are tact, kindness, broadmindedness and charity. Snobbishness is the one element that must be eliminated from this group of helpers.

Sixth—Music Committee. Appoint one member only. Unless you want to spoil your chance for a successful pageant, do not appoint as a music committee the various choir leaders or heads of musical associations. Let the one member of the Music Committee be the musical director, and permit him to choose as many assistants as he desires. When once the committee is appointed, stand loyally by the choice, exerting due efforts to see that nothing falls short of full and complete cooperation.

Seventh—The Costume Committee. As with the Music Committee, so with the Costume Committee—one person should be in charge. This member—ordinarily known as the wardrobe mistress—may, of course, appoint as many assistants as she desires, but she must be the responsible one, whose duty it is to see that all costumes are promptly and properly prepared and accounted for.

All the Pageant Committees, from the Supervising Committee to the Costume Committee, should work together harmoniously in the endeavor to follow to the letter the instructions of the Pageant Master.

The pageant organization resembles the organization of an army. The Pageant Master is commander-in-chief. The Supervising Committee is the war council; the other committees are departmental heads.

When such an organization acts, if harmony is maintained, and if all the committees faithfully perform their tasks, a successful and profitable pageant results.

CHAPTER V.

Finances and Advertising.

IMPORTANT in making plans for a pageant are the questions of finance. Is a pageant expensive to produce, and can it be made profitable? Experience proves that money can be made out of a pageant, and that the expense of production need never be out of proportion to the returns. There are, of course, no fixed rules as to the outlay required for a satisfactory production. Much depends upon the size of the city and the probable response of the public. Sometimes money has been lost on pageants, but so it has on any kind of venture. As the comparatively few cases of loss invariably trace to inefficient advertising, it may safely be stated that a properly advertised pageant always brings profitable returns.

Making money should not be the first, or even the second or third object of pageantry. The primary objects have already been stated, and need not be repeated here. But to those who need to be assured that the undertaking will not involve financial loss, the evidence is submitted that all well advertised pageants have paid beyond the expectations of the promoters.

These suggestions to the Publicity Committee are not intended as any kind of a complete resume of all the things the committee should do. The committee should use every available method for keeping the pageant in the eyes and the ears of the public. Advertising the pageant is one thing that can not be overdone.

It is well to enlist the services of the most successful advertisers in the community. They will be able to suggest new and novel methods that would escape those not directly connected with the advertising business.

Have a good representative in each church and each lodge in the city, and instruct these representatives to see that the announcement is frequently brought to the attention of the members.

Use the public schools. That an enthusiastic child is the best advertising medium is witnessed by the success of the great American Circus.

Advertise a balloon ascension the day the tickets go on sale. From the top of some tall building release twelve toy balloons, each with a free ticket attached. A most interesting and exciting chase will ensue, but seldom will any of the tickets be lost.

When possible get permission to indicate by arrows painted on the sidewalks the direction of the pageant grounds. Printed arrows placed in prominent windows also do good service.

Hold a contest for the best posters drawn by the members of the High School. Give the contest wide publicity and display the winning posters in prominent places.

Use skill in getting favorable free notices in the newspapers, but also spend real money in running display ads. Display ads bring prof-

itable returns. Provide daily bulletins for the papers, giving news of the rehearsals.

Plan your advertising campaign systematically, so that it progressively increases in interest and intensity toward the final days. Hit the iron while it is hot. Two weeks of rapid fire work will bag more game than months of dilatory attacks upon the public. Keep at it. Remember the lines from Chidian Philosophy:

Let a man talk a very long while,
Let a man talk a very long while,
Let a man talk a very long while,
A hole he will bore in a rock.

CHAPTER VI.

Hints for the Pageant Master.

LET us use the term "Master" for the one who directs the pageant. A woman is as deserving of the title as a man, for with man or woman nothing short of mastery is required to effectively present a pageant. The terms "mistress" and "actress" are rapidly giving way to the more suitable ones of "master" and "actor," and soon we may consistently say with Shakespeare: "All the world's a stage, and all the people *actors* on it."

To those who have not had considerable experience with big undertakings, the best advice is to begin on something smaller than a pageant. To those who have successfully staged pageants, these hints are intended to be suggestive only, and are given with due reticence.

Prominent among the characteristics of a successful master are a cool head, ability to think quickly, and a forceful, pleasing personality. Vexations come from all sides, and unless one can calmly meet difficulties, he lacks something required for successful producing. A slow thinker has no more business trying to manage a pageant than has a chess player trying to manage a major baseball league. Quick decision is essential. A master must have a personality that is forceful as well as pleasing, so that he can give orders in a manner that makes obedience a pleasure.

Such are the prominent outward characteristics of one qualified to be a pageant master. But beneath these, and just as necessary, must be the abiding desire to serve and the sincere purpose to give out help through personal presence as well as through the final completed beautiful drama or spectacle. Usefulness is the foundation and service the keystone of this, as of all other kinds of mastery.

Often a master makes the mistake of trying to do too much of the work himself. He goes by the rule that the best way to get a thing done right is to do it yourself. And it is, when there is only one thing to be done; but where, as with the pageant, there are literally a thousand things to be done, that old rule is superseded by the better one: The way to get things done is to get helpers to do them as well or better than you would yourself. To supervise does not mean the neglect of details, but rather the careful attention to details through the medium of helpers.

This recommendation may be carried into the rehearsals. It is not so necessary to show the caste just what to do and just how to do it as it is to convey to the performers a picture, a conception, of the effect you want. Thus you may play upon your caste as the leader of

an orchestra plays upon the particular divisions of instruments with resultant beauty and harmony.

Many a pageant has come short of its possibilities because the master lacked faith. You must not only have faith, but you must let each person feel that your faith is especially well founded in him. For bad rehearsals there is no cure like the faith cure.

Withal you must have system. It is surprising what an aid it is to have definitely arranged rehearsals at hours suited to the particular divisions to be rehearsed. Avoid, at least through the preparatory days, the confusion of having too many on hand at one time. Whenever possible, use large charts showing at just what hours certain classes are to receive instructions.

At the beginning it is well for a master to diplomatically let the committees and members of the caste know that he is developing ability for mind reading, and does not on that account need to be informed about anybody. By some such a method he may be able to avoid some of the gossip that a few feel it their special mission to retail.

Finally, so live and work that through you the community may be brought to a better understanding of itself and its mission, and that the vision of the pageant will reflect inner progress, the ultimate of which reaches beyond the power of human knowledge to calculate.

CHAPTER VII.

Material for Pageants.

PAGEANTRY opens almost limitless resources for the exercise of literary genius and dramatic imagination. Play writing meets in the pageant the encouragement of elastic technique, and ready made material. All that is required is skill to arrange the facts so as to give them dramatic appeal.

The facts, the materials, are ever at hand. In the history of a city, a state, or a nation there are incidents enough to make many pleasing pageants. Historical pageants have the special merit of inculcating patriotism. There are thousands of ways in which the progress and ideals of this Nation can be forcefully presented. For instance, the growth of this Nation from its weak babyhood to its present position as the big brother and protector of all nations; or the example for world union found in the inter-action and cooperation of these states; or the industrial progress from the crude transportation, agriculture and manufacturing of the past to the present astonishing developments in efficiency; or in the educational methods, showing the growth and benefits of the public school system; or in the realm of entertainment, presenting the old literary society and singing school as contrasted with the present-day commercialized entertainment; or the absorption of the foreign element, illustrating that America is truly a "Melting Pot"; all of these are only a beginning of possible national subjects.

As large a field is found in state and city history, to say nothing of the possibility—as is often successfully done—of combining in a single pageant some of the history of all three—city, state and nation.

The problems of a community are suitable subjects for pageantry. For instance: If the problem is to remove the slums, the idea may be pictured by showing the good spirits—the fairies and flowers—perishing for the want of wholesome atmosphere, but rescued in the nick of time by an invasion of cleaning hosts, who put to rout the imps of filth and then resuscitate the beautiful little ones.

Picturesqueness, almost everywhere available, is an invaluable aid to the pageant. The natural stage is as a rule superior to an artificial structure, and trees and water are materials never neglected by the knowing pageant maker. When the pageant is given out of doors care should be used to avoid any marring of the natural beauty. Local color gives life to the pageant without detracting from its major aims, which are to teach the lessons of service and brotherhood.

Wherever men have pioneered and struggled to carry forward civilization, wherever victories for right have been achieved; wherever by heroic action or by patient enduring the great cause of progress has been nurtured, that ground is holy ground, and the incidents there enacted are sacred incidents, worthy of commemoration in pageantry.

CHAPTER VIII.

Dont's.

DON'T read these don'ts in the wrong spirit; they are written to help you avoid mistakes, and are not intended as criticism.

Don't let your enthusiasm grow cold. Nothing succeeds like enthusiasm.

Don't be late at rehearsals. Come promptly at the minute, and leave as soon as you have finished with your part. Waiting to see the others work embarrasses them and detracts their attention.

Don't detain your pageant master to ask silly or useless questions. Remember the master has enough to do to look after important details.

Don't hold spite or be a victim of petty jealousy. Be willing to sacrifice the honor you think you should receive in order to preserve harmony and promote the final success of the great event.

Don't be sensitive about your children, mothers. Remember that in a pageant it is as important to have the small parts well acted as to have the stars cover themselves with glory. To do small parts well is meritorious. Be willing that your children shall do well, whatever parts are assigned to them.

Don't give too many suggestions. As all pageant masters know the value of suggestions, it is well to wait until asked for an opinion before you venture a correction or an improvement. "Too many cooks spoil the broth." The best efficiency depends upon harmonious action, possible only when one general has control.

Don't fail to stay faithfully with the task assigned to you. Don't be a quitter. See it through.

Don't (most important) skimp on money spent for advertising. There are three rules for getting the crowds to attend. The first is to advertise; the second is to advertise some more; the third is to advertise still more.

Don't advertise falsely. State the truth. Don't say you will have a thousand in the caste when you know you are really going to have less than five hundred.

Don't make too much a feature of advertising your pageant master. Advertise rather the goods you are going to deliver. Say, if you wish, that this is to be the biggest affair ever presented in your city, and then see to it that it is; but do not make it appear that your director is to going to be the major part of the show. It is not the director's job to entertain, and his stage appearance is not essential to the success of the pageant.

Don't fail to be charitable and considerate of those who find their parts difficult to master. Help them with kind thoughts and remember that any one deserves credit for being willing to do his best, even if that best is imperfect.

Don't be touchy and excitable. Be big, broadminded, and generous. What if there are of necessity those in the caste who do not measure up to your high standard of respectability! They are part of your town, and therefore part of your pageant family.

Don't lose sight of the big brotherhood ideal that is fundamental in pageantry. The three great words which spell success in pageant building are *faith*, *system* and *harmony*. Faith begets confidence in action; system begets order in arrangements; harmony begets beauty in presentation. Taken together, the combination begets a successful pageant.

THE END.

*"Where the city of the faithfulest friends stands,
Where the city of the cleanliness of the sexes stands,
Where the city of the healthiest fathers stands,
Where the city of the best-bodied mothers stands,
There the greatest city stands."*

WALT WHITMAN



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